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REVIEW OF THE EFFICIENCY OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE AND FINANCIAL FUNCTIONING OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Prototype of a new format of the medium-term plan

Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee an Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General on the prototype of a new format of the medium-term plan contained in document A/49/301. In the course of the Committee's deliberation, the Controller provided additional information on the subject.

2. As stated in paragraph 1 of the report of the Secretary-General, the prototype of a new format of the medium-term plan has been prepared in response to section I.B of General Assembly resolution 48/218 A of 23 December 1993, in which the Assembly reiterated its request to the Secretary-General to submit the prototype to the Assembly at its forty-ninth session, through the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions.

3. The Advisory Committee recalls that the Committee for Programme and Coordination, during the second part of its thirty-forth session, considered and welcomed the proposed new format of the medium-term plan, which would consist of a perspective and a programme framework for a period of four years, beginning in 1998. The observations and recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination on the new format of the medium-term plan are contained in its report. 1/

4. The prototype of the medium-term plan, as submitted by the Secretary-General, takes into account the recommendation of the Committee for Programme and Coordination that the current medium-term plan should be replaced by a document containing the following elements:

(a) A perspective, which would be a concise forward-looking policy document. It would contain an analysis of persistent problems and challenges and emerging trends that would need to be addressed by the international community within the next four to six years and the role of the Organization in that undertaking. The perspective would indicate broad priority areas for the work of the Organization; it would be amended only if pressing needs of an unforeseeable nature arose during the period covered;

(b) A programme framework, which would list only major programmes and subprogrammes and would provide guidelines against which the preparation and implementation of the budget would be assessed. The narrative of each programme should consist of a brief one-page chapter detailing its objectives and mandates. The programme framework should be reviewed regularly every two years in the off-budget year in an effective manner to reflect new mandates.

5. In paragraph 6 of his report, the Secretary-General outlines his vision of a perspective, which would cover a period of four years, beginning 1998. The Advisory Committee, bearing in mind section I.B of General Assembly resolution 48/218 A (see A/49/301, paras. 2 and 3), believes that a six-year cycle for the perspective would be more consistent with the use of the perspective as a "forward-looking policy document". At the same time, the Committee points out that there are several issues related to the perspective that require further clarification by the Secretary-General, considering the requirements outlined in paragraph 4 (a) above. For example, it is not clear how "broad priority areas for the work of the Organization" will be determined, what the criteria will be for amending the perspective and what the exact meaning could be of "pressing needs of an unforeseeable nature".

6. In paragraphs 7 to 13 of his report, the Secretary-General describes the programme framework. The Committee notes from paragraph 10 of the report, that "the programme framework would be congruent with organizational lines". As stated in paragraph 7 of the report, "congruence would also enhance accountability by ensuring that responsibility is clearly identified for the delivery of a programme and for achieving the results the programme is meant to produce". The Advisory Committee points out that while the structure of the medium-term plan can be congruent with organizational lines, it should always be recognized that it emanates from legislative mandates. In this connection, the Advisory Committee notes the recommendation of the Committee for Programme and Coordination that "the relevant legislative mandates should be indicated in the narrative of the programmes". 2/ The Advisory Committee points out that regulation 3.6 of the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation stipulates that the medium-term plan shall be presented by programme and objective, and not by organizational unit, and that rule 103.6, paragraph (d) (iv), which applies to substantive activities, reads as follows:

> "The subprogramme structure shall be based on objectives rather than on the internal administrative structure of the Secretariat unit responsible for the programme".

These provisions would have to be amended to conform to the new structure of the medium-term plan, if adopted.

7. The Committee points out that the relationship between the programme framework and the budget outline needs to be indicated, since both documents will be submitted in the off-budget year. The Advisory Committee cautions against any merger of the two in order to avoid the development of a full-scale budget exercise one year before the proposed programme budget itself is actually presented.

8. The Advisory Committee also points to the need to ensure that the text of the proposed programme budget is consistent with and makes explicit reference to the objectives stated in the medium-term plan. To this end, relevant indicators in the proposed programme budget should, to the extent possible, be described with reference to programme objectives.

9. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 12 of the report of the Secretary-General that the new format of the medium-term plan would lead to a consolidation of subprogrammes and to a reduction in their number. In this connection, the Advisory Committee notes that in its report the Committee for Programme and Coordination stated its understanding that "annexes I and II to document A/49/301 were for illustrative purposes only". 3/ The Advisory Committee was provided with additional information on the relationship between programmes in the current medium-term plan and the proposed new format, which is reproduced in annex I below. The Committee was also provided with a timetable for the introduction of new procedures related to the medium-term plan, which is reproduced in annex II below. The Committee requests the Secretary-General to provide information to the General Assembly on the implementation of this schedule thus far. The Advisory Committee trusts that in the process of consolidation, all mandates will be preserved unless it is specifically decided otherwise by the respective intergovernmental bodies. Furthermore, the Committee requests the Secretary-General to clearly explain the rationale for the consolidation of subprogrammes and the criteria for dividing certain programmes among organizational units.

10. The Advisory Committee shares the view of the Secretary-General that the usefulness of the medium-term plan as currently conceived "has been increasingly called into question both within the Secretariat and among Member States" (A/49/301, para. 2). The Advisory Committee therefore recommends approval of the proposed new format of the medium-term plan, provided that the observations of the Advisory Committee reflected in the above paragraphs, if approved by the General Assembly, are fully taken into account. It is also the understanding of the Advisory Committee that, should the Assembly approve the proposal of the Secretary-General, he will submit for consideration by the Assembly the necessary revisions to the Regulations and Rules Governing Programme Planning, the Programme Aspects of the Budget, the Monitoring of Implementation and the Methods of Evaluation.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 16 (A/49/16), part two, paras. 110-114.

2/ Ibid., para. 110 (b).

3/ Ibid., para. 110 (a).

ANNEX I

Relationship between programmes in the current medium-term plan and the proposed new format

Programme (new format)	Organizational unit	Programmes in the current medium-term plan
1. Political affairs	Department of Political Affairs	1. Good offices, preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peace-keeping, research and the collection and analysis of information (part) 2. Political and Security Council affairs (part) 3. General Assembly affairs 4. Department of Political Affairs (part) 5. Question of Palestine 6. Elimination of apartheid 7. Disarmament
2. Peace-keeping operations	Department of Peace-keeping Operations	1. Good offices, preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peace-keeping, research and the collection and analysis of information (part) 43. General services (part - field operations support)
3. Outer Space affairs	Office for Outer Space Affairs	8. Peaceful uses of outer space
4. Legal affairs	Office of Legal Affairs	9. International law 10. Law of the sea and ocean affairs

Programme (new format)	Organizational unit	Programmes in the current medium-term plan
5. Policy coordination and sustainable development	Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development	11. Overall issues and policies, including coordination (part) 12. Global development issues and policies (part) 17. Science and technology for sustainable development (part) 19. Natural resources (part) 20. Energy (part) 25. Global social issues and policies (part) 26. Integration of social groups (part) 27. Advancement of women 45. Africa: critical economic situation, recovery and development (part)
6. Economic and social information and policy analysis	Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis	12. Global development issues and policies (part) 18. Population 24. Statistics
7. Development support and management services	Department for Development Support and Management Services	12. Global development issues and policies (part) 19. Natural resources (part) 20. Energy (part) 21. Public administration and finance 25. Global social issues and policies (part) 26. Integration of social groups (part)
8. Crime prevention and criminal justice	Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Branch	29. Crime prevention and criminal justice
9. Environment	United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)	16. Environment
10. Human settlements	United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat)	22. Human settlements

Programme (new format)	Organizational unit	Programmes in the current medium-term plan
11. Trade and development	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)	13. Trade and development 14. Trade expansion, export promotion and service sector development 15. Least developed, land-locked and island developing countries, and special programmes 17. Science and technology for sustainable development (part) 23. Transnational corporations
12. Regional cooperation for development in Africa	Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)	30. Regional cooperation for development in Africa 45. Africa: critical economic situation, recovery and development (part)
13. Regional cooperation for development in Asia and the Pacific	Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP)	31. Regional cooperation for development in Asia and the Pacific
14. Regional cooperation for development in Europe	Economic Commission for Europe (ECE)	32. Regional cooperation for development in Europe
15. Regional cooperation for development in Latin America and the Caribbean	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)	33. Regional cooperation for development in Latin America and the Caribbean
16. Regional cooperation for development in Western Asia	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)	34. Regional cooperation for development in Western Asia
17. International drug control	United Nations International Drug Control Programme	28. International drug control
18. Human rights	Centre for Human Rights	35. Promotion and protection of human rights

Programme (new format)	Organizational unit	Programmes in the current medium-term plan
19. Humanitarian affairs	Department for Humanitarian Affairs	37. Emergency humanitarian assistance
20. Protection and assistance to refugees	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)	36. International protection of and assistance to refugees
21. Palestine refugees	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)	36. International protection of and assistance to refugees
22. Public information	Department of Public Information	38. Public information 39. Conference and library services (part) 44. Services to the public (part) 45. Africa: critical economic situation, recovery and development (part)
23. Administrative services	Department of Administration and Management	39. Conference and library services (part) 40. Administrative direction and management (part) 41. Human resources management 42. Programme planning, budget and finance (part) 43. General services (part) 44. Services to the public (part)
24. Internal oversight	Office of Internal Oversight Services	40. Administrative direction and management (part) 42. Programme planning, budget and finance (part)

ANNEX II

Schedule for preparation and review of the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001

1995

January	Instructions to programme managers for preparation of the medium-term plan for the period 1998-2001
January-October	Drafting of the medium-term plan by programme managers
February-October	Consultations on the medium-term plan with and/or review by intergovernmental bodies which do not meet in 1996, or which meet during or after the Committee for Programme and Coordination in 1996
November	Submission of the draft medium-term plan by programme managers to the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts for central review

1996

January-April	Review of the draft medium-term plan by specialized intergovernmental bodies (where applicable)
February-March	Central review and finalization of the draft medium-term plan, including the perspective
End-March	Approval of the proposed medium-term plan by the Secretary-General for submission to the General Assembly
May-June	Review of the proposed medium-term plan by the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions
July	Review of the proposed medium-term plan by the Economic and Social Council
October-December	Review and approval of the proposed medium-term plan for 1998-2001 by the General Assembly

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